Writers in Progress 2014 – 2015

Essays by NECC Writing Students

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JOURNAL
PREWRITING
INTRODUCTION
THESIS

TOPIC SENTENCE
PARAGRAPH
DRAFT
DETAILS

ANECDOTES
TRANSITIONS
DIALOGUE
CONCLUSION

REVISE
PROOFREAD
FORMAT
EDIT

Writers in Progress

is a publication of

The Writing Center

Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill, Massachusetts

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Table of Contents

Describing a Meaningful Object:

"Uniform of Freedom" by Cindy Parra — 1
"My Lucky Bracelet" by Jeselines Rosario — 5
"Freedom Ride" by Daniel Giannatsis — 8

Describing a Person Who Has Influenced You:

"My Knight in Shining Qualities" by Rashelly Espinal — 12
"One of My Biggest Supporters" by Gary Cooke — 17
"My Baby Boy" by Suzanne Eaton — 21

Writing a Narrative Essay, Using Dialogue:

"Step Toward My Future" by Edna Juliet Colon — 25
"Powerfully Foreign" by Nour Darwich — 30
"Beautiful Blue Eyes" by Brian Huberdeau — 36

"This I Believe" Essay:

"Hard Work" by Caitlin Limoli — 42

Analyzing the Role of Media in Your Daily Life:

"What Do You Mean, You Still Read Books?" by Elizabeth Hunter — 44
"Peaceful Melodies" by Robely Castillo — 49

Forming an Opinion About a Controversial Issue:

"Supporting the So-Called Soda Ban" by Alaina Marino — 52
"A Work in Progress" by TezMariah Cole — 56
"An American Hero" by Stefanie Almodovar — 60

An Essay About Your Portfolio of Writing:

"Dramatic Change" by Amy Gigliotti — 64
"Writing Has Helped Me Grow" by Samantha Dacey — 67
"Time Flies" by Cody Merrill — 69

English Composition I Research Paper

"ELL in America" by Jackie Blanchette — 72

Frequently Asked Questions

...about *Writers in Progress (WIP)*

Q: What is the purpose of this book?

A: This book provides models of the essays that your instructor may assign this semester.

Q: Who wrote these essays?

A: Most essays were written by last year's Basic Writing students; the only exceptions to this are the "This I Believe" essay and the "English Composition 1 Research Paper."

Q: How are these essays chosen?

A: The essays in this reader were reviewed by a committee. Essays selected follow assignment guidelines and are organized and well developed. They are usually graded essays that have been polished again after the instructor's feedback.

Q: Do I have to write all of these essays?

A: No, not all of the sample essays will apply to you. Please follow your instructor's directions to determine which essays you will need to write.

Q: Am I expected to write this well?

A: Students have revised these essays many times based on suggestions from peer reviewers, Writing Center tutors, and instructors. Before publication, the *WIP* committee also proofreads all of the essays and makes necessary final edits to comply with correct grammar and MLA guidelines.

Q: Should I add graphics to my essay?

A: Graphics are added to make *WIP* more visually appealing; however, graphics are not usually included in academic essays. Please see your instructor if you have questions about the use of graphics in your essay.

Q: How can I submit my essay?

A: An instructor or writing tutor may suggest that you submit your essay to *WIP* if it is an excellent example of a particular assignment. If so, please email the essay as a Microsoft Word or.rtf attachment to writingcenter@necc.mass.edu. Please include the following in your email: your full name, the best way to contact you (email and phone), the semester/year, and your instructor's name.

Cindy Parra

Basic Writing

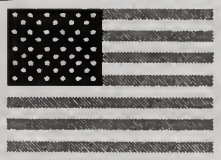
Object Essay

October 10, 2013

Uniform of Freedom

One of the most meaningful objects I possess is my military uniform because it describes who I am, what I'm made of, but most importantly what I believe in. There are two types of uniform, the combat uniform and the dress uniform; my uniform is the combat uniform. Many people have worn the uniform before me to defend our great nation and our beliefs, but I feel like my uniform is special because it belongs to me, because it has made me the woman I am today, and because it represents freedom and the American way of life.

My uniform is of a dirty green color, almost like a swamp color mix with grayish-like color, and that combination is called camouflage. It is from a mixed blend texture, but it is very comfortable. My uniform consists of two parts, which are a pair of pants and a long sleeve jacket. My uniform jacket has a few labels on it: one with my last name, another with US Army, and one with the rank which represents what status I have in the military. The jacket consists of a few pockets with zippers and Velcro to secure it. On the sleeves of the jacket are my patches, one on each side; also on the right side there is an American flag. One of the patches represents the unit I belong to, and the other represents my deployment overseas. I worked hard to earn the right to wear my uniform; the patches on it demonstrate my hard work and dedication to it. My uniform tells the story of a battlefield. It has felt the pain and heat of being deployed to Iraq. It has felt the burning sun penetrating like a bullet.



care + use

I used to wear my uniform every day for four years when I was in active duty, but now I only wear my uniform once a month, for one weekend, sometimes even longer, and it is because now I'm part of the US Army Reserves. I keep my uniform nice and clean in my closet, so nothing will get on it. I take pride in the way my uniform looks, and I do so because of everything that it represents to me.

sight

memory

I got my uniform when I first joined the military back in 2008; to be more specific I got it on October 14, 2008. It was a nice warm morning in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I was exhausted, tired, and hungry. I was standing in a line with a bunch of other people. They had us line up by our last name; mine being Parra, I was almost at the end of it. I waited for about three hours; at last I heard my name being called. There was a wall full from top to bottom with uniforms of all sizes. A lady asked me what my size was. As I proceeded to tell her, she interrupted me before I could even finish. She looked at me and handed me a pair of smalls. It was folded nicely, and at that moment right there it made me feel like I was part of something greater than what I could have imagined.

memory

When I think about my uniform, a memory that comes to my mind is the time I was deployed to Iraq. I was deployed February 2011 with a behavioral unit. There were about thirty of us, and then we separated into small teams. I was responsible for the junior enlisted soldiers in my team. Some of my battle buddies and I used to go to the hospital that was across from our clinic after work to play games because they had a big TV. One particular night, after a week or so of us being "in theater," we decided not to go and play games like usual. I decided to go to my room and change my uniform, but instead I went to visit my friends on the other side of the camp. As I was outside smoking a cigarette, I saw some flares in the sky that looked like it was on fire. At that moment I didn't know what it was;

smell

sight

suddenly all I could hear was, "There has been an indirect fire attack! All personnel take cover!" I ran to a building that was close by to wait for the 'all clear" message. Once I heard that, I ran back to the clinic to check on my team; when I got there, all I could see were fire trucks, ambulances, military police helicopters, and a bunch of people gathered around the hospital. Later I found out that the laboratory had been blown up with what they think was a mortar. Our game room was next to it, and it had been destroyed too. To think that if I had gone that night to play I wouldn't be here today is amazing. Every time I look at my uniform I think of that time, and I'm grateful to be here.

I have many memories with my uniform, but another one that stands out from the others is one night that I was in my room, when all of a sudden there was an enormous noise, as if the world was coming to an end. I quickly dropped to the ground knowing that my life depended on it; the first thing I grabbed was my military jacket. I rapidly got dressed, took my rifle, and went outside to make sure everybody was safe and sound. When I got outside, everyone was running around; the explosion had hit close to our living quarters. There was so much commotion and confusion; people were crying and running. It was chaos all around me. Some people were injured. Thankfully there were no people in the room where the explosion happened. I thank God every day that there were no casualties and that my team was OK.

My uniform represents the blood that many American soldiers have shed fighting for freedom: the freedom to say the things that we want, to believe what we want, to live, eat, dress, and do all the things we want. It also represents the difference between freedom and oppression. It also represents an elite team of people that choose to join in a time of war knowing that they could lose their lives. To me, my uniform holds a very special place in my heart because it brings honor to my name and my family. Thanks to my

uniform I get recognized as part of a team, the greatest team, the US Army. That's why my uniform is one of the most meaningful objects I own. I plan on keeping my uniform for as long as I can, so I can show it to my son and maybe even his kids one day, so they can learn what I was part of, what I was made of, and most importantly how much it means to me.

Jeselines Rosario

Basic Writing

Object Essay

September 19, 2013

My Lucky Bracelet

Have you ever thought about how a person can become so attached to something so small? Well the most important guy in my life gave me this amazing Pandora bracelet. To many it might just be a simple Pandora bracelet, but for me it's more than that! It's one of my most treasured items. I always wear it and hardly ever take it off. My bracelet always seems to bring me good luck and happiness wherever I go. some meaning

This double-laced bracelet means more to me than any other gift I have received from any other person. My bracelet is a light shade of pink. It's as light as a feather and bends as a straw would. The bracelet consists of structured leather that's been knitted with spirals at the end. Each end of the bracelet is different depending on the person who bought you the bracelet and what they wanted to put on it. On one end of my bracelet there is a locket that says Pandora, and on the other end there is a spiral which the charms go on through. So far my bracelet only has three charms, also known as "mojos." These charms are a Buddha, a cancer-free charm, and a love charm. Every time I move I hear the clinking of the charms clinking upon each other. sight feel sound

On a snowy Christmas, December 25, 2012, I received my bracelet. I had received all my presents from my mother as well as all my presents from other family members. I was just waiting for my stepfather's gift! At first I thought he had forgotten my present or simply hadn't bought me anything. But when I was saying my thanks to my mom and sister, he came behind me and surprised me by saying, "Here's one more gift for you!" memory

"Really?!" I replied.

"You thought I had forgotten you, but I didn't. The first gift I bought was this one." As I opened the small gift bag, I saw a box with the name Pandora on it. I was really excited to finally open it, that by the time I opened it and saw the amazing bracelet I ran to my stepfather's arm and gave him a big hug. "Thank you, Daddy! It's what I always wanted!" I said. As I tried my bracelet on, my sister started giving me the charms that they had bought me. I was really glad about the two charms I had gotten, which were a love charm and a Buddha.

meaning again

For many others it might just be a simple bracelet, but to me it's what takes all the bad luck away. I always wear this bracelet; I wear it when I feel unsafe or when I'm going to a place that I know I'm not sure about. I believe it keeps me safe from all bad luck, but it's also a gift that I love and adore. I'm emotionally attached to my bracelet. It also gives me comfort on those hard days when I just smile on the outside, and on the inside I just want to cry. But most of all, when I'm thinking of the people that love me and care for me, it always brings a smile back to my face. My stepfather is simply not just a stepfather, but he is my father! He has showed me that there is no difference between me and my sister, who is his biological daughter! My smile grows back every time I think to myself and say, "I do have a father and relatives that love me." I only have to look back at my bracelet and know that.

feelings

care & meaning

Most of the time I barely take it off, and when I do, I keep it in a nice antique jewelry box that I got for my sweet 15. The antique jewelry box sits on top of my night stand where I keep lots of pictures of close family members. There are times that instead of wearing my bracelet I carry it around in my purse or in my pockets. I have traveled alone to the Dominican Republic, and let me tell you, I'm terrified of airplanes, but when I have my bracelet on I just hold my

hands really tight and remember that I am safe and that nothing bad is going to happen. When I'm either feeling lonely, unsafe, or simply not in a good mood, I always wear it because when I look at it, it shows me that I am not alone in this world and that I have people that do care for me like my parents and siblings.

meaning

We can start by saying that an amazing bracelet like mine does have good luck and once you add charms that do relate to your life it adds more and more luck. On March 10, 2012, my godmother was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was one of the worst things that has ever happened in my life. I felt as if god was taking away the only person that I could trust and talk to. Tears and tears ran down my cheeks thinking that she was going to die, but till today she is still alive. My godmother is like my second mother, and I love her to death. As time went by she went through chemotherapy and got her breast removed. She was getting better and things were improving. She got her hair back and her strength back. My godmother survived breast cancer, and she is doing much better. So one day as I was walking around the mall I decided to go into the Pandora store. I thought about what other charms to get, and I got a cancer-free charm because one of my dearest family members survived breast cancer.

each char another memory

My Pandora bracelet brings me good luck and happiness. Whenever I feel unsafe, it always protects me from anything bad happening. When I feel lonely or sad, I have something to remind me that I have loving parents. Without my bracelet I think I wouldn't feel as happy or comfortable wherever I go. I plan on adding more and more charms that have meaning to my life and that are special to me. And as I grow older and older I'll keep on adding to my collection of charms that relate to my life, like my three amazing charms that I have on it right now.

meaning

Daniel Giannatsis

Basic Writing

Object Essay

June 20, 2013

Freedom Ride

The most important and meaningful object in my life would have to be my BMX bike. For those who don't know about freestyle BMX, it's an extreme sport that involves riding ramps and street obstacles to perform tricks and insane feats at great speed and heights. My bike is unique to only me because of the custom parts I've accumulated over the years. My bike is important to me because of what I do with it and how it gives me a sense of freedom and individuality that nothing else in life so far seems to satisfy. I guess I can be considered an adrenaline junkie.

My bike has raw metal bars, a chrome fork and 21-inch chrome rims, metal-studded plastic pedals, and a blue stem. The grips are made of a special grainy rubber that absorbs sweat. The whole bike weighs about 24 pounds; the parts are made of chromoly, a type of steel alloy that is both light and strong. The weight is important because the lighter the bike is, the easier the bike can be controlled in the air and greater heights can be achieved. The cassette driver makes clicking noises, and when landing the tires make a "foomp" sound. The only notable smells are the metallic smells of new parts and the rubbery odor of new grips and tires. To some, upwards of one thousand dollars may seem like a lot, but being my passion, money is not an object.

How I use my bike is I ride everything that I can, whether it is street ledges and banks around Lowell or Haverhill or Groveland, or riding ramps at local skate parks in Amesbury or

bigger bike parks like Rye Airfield in Rye, New Hampshire. The basics of BMX is to get air (which means for the rider and the bike to become airborne) by going off jumps and in that airtime is a short window of time for doing tricks. Common tricks that I do are bar spins, which are one full rotation of the bars while the frame is in place, and tail whips, which are one full rotation of the frame while the bars are in place. There are also rotational tricks I do where you spin while in the air like 180s, which are half a rotation, landing backwards, and 360s, which are one full rotation. There are even harder rotational tricks like 720s, which are two full spins and the hardest of all, the 1080, which are three full spins. Other, more difficult tricks I'm working on are backflips, which are a full backwards vertical rotation and icepicks, which are grinding on just the back peg on a ledge or a rail. There is a high risk of injury, but with practice a trick can become "dialed" which means to master a trick. I broke my leg learning backflips, but now I can do them no problem on box jumps. Re-learning something like that after going through such an injury was scary, but it's a high-risk, high-reward sport. No matter where or what I ride, I'm using my bike in new and creative ways, and the most important thing to remember is to have fun on the bike always.

How I got the bike that I have today is by breaking my old bike. A few years ago I broke my silver frame riding at Rye Airfield. I was doing a bar spin on a quarter pipe, and for some reason when I landed the front end connected to the fork snapped. At first I didn't even realize it was broken, but then I kept hearing a clicking noise when I landed. The good thing was that I had a warranty on my frame, so I went online to Danscomp, a BMX website. The silver one that I broke wasn't in stock, so I settled for the red one that I run today.

My bike has a special place in my garage, a slot in the wall so I can keep it standing up. I have a tray and a bench full of tools and replacement parts at the ready for any problem my bike

might have. Every few months or so I replace the tires and grips, and every six months or so I replace the chain. Sometimes landing hard can cause the spokes to get whacked out of place, and I need to use a spoke wrench to correct it. Other problems can arise but, luckily most can be fixed mechanically. Taking care of my BMX bike is not a chore in my eyes because it is just another aspect of the sport.

memory One of the greatest memories I have of my bike was when I went to Woodward, an extreme sports camp in central Pennsylvania. I was in the skate park called Section Eight, riding ramps all day. There was a high jump contest that day. The high jump contest was basically a "box jump," which consists of a large takeoff ramp and a landing, and a bar set at a specific height. The object of the contest was to go as fast as possible at the ramp and clear the bar. Every round the bar was moved higher and higher, increasing the difficulty. For the first few rounds, many people cleared the bar easily. At about five feet high people started to hit the bar. My bike, being light, made it easy to clear the bar and didn't feel hesitant approaching the jump until the bar was seven or eight feet above the lip of the ramp. At eight feet I was getting scary high and barely making it over the bar, landing hard on the other side. At nine feet there was only a handful of people left. I pedaled as hard as possible and hit the jump. I leaned forward too much and although I got over the bar I crashed on the other side. I came in fourth for the competition, and I still felt proud I had made it almost nine feet in the air. I'll remember that day as one of the most awesome memories I have riding my bike.

means My bike and BMX as a sport will always mean a sense of freedom to me. The type of freedom I experience is a feeling to shape the world as I see fit doing the thing that I love. It allows me to see the world in a different light than most people, the boundaries of my riding limited only by what I can come up with in my mind. People don't look at things like the way

walls are set up or stairs or ledges, but to a BMX rider they are like an artist's canvas, ready to be tapped. My bike also gives me freedom from judgments or criticism. I don't care about anyone's opinion or views of me when I'm riding; it seems to just melt away. It makes me feel rebellious, that I'm doing something out of the norm. And there exists some nostalgia, and the notion that everything that I've ever done has led up to what I can do today. That things I would never dream of being able to do a year or even months ago I have learned by practicing and hard work and even some luck. All this said, my bike has so much meaning in my life, and I honestly don't know who I would be without it. It truly is part of my identity.

Rashelly Espinal

Basic Writing

Person Essay

October 10, 2013

My Knight in Shining Qualities

Sometimes it's the person you least expect that makes the greatest impact on you. To others, most of the time it's their parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles. But for me, he's not a relative; he's my boyfriend, Antonio Rodrigues. Just hearing his name brings me immense joy to the point where the butterflies in my stomach begin to flutter uncontrollably. He has many qualities that make him perfect in my eyes, but the four qualities that stand out to me are that he's futuristic, hardworking, supportive, and protective.

Antonio is Portuguese and Irish: Portuguese from his father's side and Irish from his mother's side. Everyone calls him TJ but not everyone knows why. His father's name is Tony. Therefore, TJ stands for "Tony Junior." He is 18 years old. I'm older by only 19 days. Not only do I look up to him because he's my role model, but also because he stands tall at a whopping five feet and eight inches. The only reason I say it like that is because I'm only five feet and one inch, and almost anyone who stands next to me just happens to be taller than me. He has these kind, hazel eyes that leave me mesmerized whenever he stares intently into mine. He has soft, light brown silky hair that makes my sense of touch tingle. His natural scent is enough to make me fall under his spell. He also has the most perfect white complexion I've ever seen. He can wear absolutely anything and look fantastic in it. His skin is so baby smooth, sometimes I find it difficult to cease touching it. The sweet sound of his voice makes me appreciate my sense of hearing all the more. And his smile? Just astounding in every way.

TJ and I talk about the future all the time. I first met him when I moved to Lawrence from Manhattan and obviously had to change schools. But we've only been dating for almost seven months. I believe that it's more common when a girl talks about her future with her boyfriend, but when a guy talks about his future with his girlfriend, he's serious. That's why I get excited whenever he brings up our future together because I can legitimately see us together for the rest of our lives. This one night, we were sitting in my car around midnight, and we were just talking about the future. We sat there for hours, talking about what our lives would be like after college is over. He brought up topics such as where we should move to, how many kids we should have, what to name our children, and marriage. Talking about all that made me realize that he's truly determined to make me his wife, and I honestly cannot wait to have the honor of calling him my husband. I am now more hopeful than ever because he makes me feel safe and secure.

When Antonio sets his mind on something that he wants, he works really hard to achieve his goal. In high school, he completed all of his homework and performed rather well on tests. That is why he finished every term with either honor roll or high honor roll. I applaud him because on top of doing his school work, he was balancing work, sports, and a social life. He also applied to many top-notch colleges. I wasn't surprised that he had gotten accepted to almost all of them. I mean, why wouldn't he? He was second in our class with a 4.2 GPA! On the night of June 6, 2013, our high school had a ceremony where students received scholarships for the colleges they would attend in the fall. The first scholarship he got was for $500. The night continued on for about another hour or so, and he thought he wasn't going to get any more scholarships because the ceremony was coming to an end. Then, the final name was called for the last scholarship of $2,000. The name was Antonio Rodrigues. I was so happy I nearly jumped off my seat. I could see that he was shaking in his boots when he went to go collect his

scholarship. His family and I were beyond proud of him. After that night, I felt motivated to work harder in order to succeed in whatever it is I decide to do in the future.

Not a day goes by where TJ doesn't support me. Even though we both attend different colleges, he still finds time to ask me about my day. It makes me sad that I don't get to see him every day. But that motivates me even more to succeed at Northern Essex, so I could transfer to UMass Lowell, where he's currently attending. One morning, he sent me a text message while I was in my first class. The professor doesn't like it when students use their phones in class, but we all do anyway. Trying not to let the teacher see me, I snuck a peek at the message. It read, "Good morning babe! Good luck with your classes. I hope you make some new friends and actually enjoy school." Just by reading that one message from him made my entire day. I love the fact that he cares enough to encourage me to do my best in school. He's one of the main reasons why I want to succeed in life. He's my motivator along with my mother, who also supports me as well. He's made me more ambitious, and I'm just really excited for what our future together holds.

Just like a mother lion, Antonio protects me like his baby cub. Before we began our separate college journeys, we used to spend almost every minute of every day together. Once he left his mother's nest, I started noticing his behavior change. He would text me often and ask how my day was going. Every time I would visit him at UMass Lowell, he would glare at the other boys who only glanced in my direction. While walking me to my car around midnight, he would hold my hand a little tighter than usual or just put his whole arm around me. Not seeing me every day has made him more apprehensive. One night in September, I went to visit him at UMass Lowell. There was a game show going on in the common area where students would answer academic questions and win prizes. I went with my friends who also attended that school

because TJ was busy doing homework in his dorm room. The game started and everyone was having a blast. I felt like an outcast because I wasn't a River Hawk. I kept scanning the room to see if I could recognize anyone I had known from high school, but by doing that I noticed something else. Someone was staring at me, someone of the opposite sex. I tried to act as if I didn't notice. Every time I looked over, his eyes would be glued on me. It made me uncomfortable to the point where I called TJ and asked him if he could join me in the common area. Once I told him why I wanted him with me, he dropped everything he was doing and took the elevator all the way from the 17th floor of Fox Hall to the first. He scurried to my side, and I immediately showed him who the creeper was. He glanced over at the guy and grew angry. The guy was attractive. TJ's insecurities were finally exposed. The thought of some other guy winning me over made him sick to his stomach. I read the look on his face. He was afraid to lose me.

"Babe," I began, "You will never have to worry about someone else stealing me away from you. I don't look at any guy the way I look at you. I don't want to say I'm obsessed with you because that sounds creepy. But I'm infatuated. Head over heels. Completely into you."

He looked deep into my eyes and replied in complete relief, "It makes me so happy to hear you say that, babe. I just want to let you know that I'll do anything to protect you and keep you. I love you."

That night I realized that I truly have someone amazing in my life. Nothing feels better than having someone love you so much, enough for their biggest fear to be losing you. His protective being has made me feel as if I were invincible and that nobody can hurt me or have power over me.

Ever since Antonio and I started dating, my life has been a walk in the park. I finally have

someone I look up to other than my parents, someone who genuinely loves me and motivates me to do and be better. I wear more smiles on my face because I know I have someone special in my life, and I honestly feel like the luckiest girl in the world. He has helped me discover who I really am, and I will forever be eternally grateful. He's given me confidence in myself and made me feel more comfortable in my own skin. His futuristic quality makes me think of the future in a positive way. His hardworking quality pushes me to do better for myself, so it can benefit the both of us. His supportive quality makes me believe in myself 100%. And his protective quality shows me that I do in fact have a guardian angel. I just pray to God that he will never change because the wonderful qualities that he has make him unsurpassable.

Gary Cooke

Basic Writing

Person Essay

February 11, 2014

One of My Biggest Supporters

I admire many different people, people in my life, like my mother and father, people from history, like Mozart and Chopin. One of the people in my life that I admire is my Aunt Carolynn. She has overcome many obstacles. She got her GED and later when she was older, like me, went to college and got a degree. She has gone through a lot of personal heartaches but still manages to be the sweetest person I know. She never forgets my birthday and always makes me feel very special. I remember a time when I was very young, around five years old, and it was Christmas.

The present from my aunt was the biggest present under the tree. I tore open the gift wrap; I couldn't open it fast enough. It was a three-story race track, with all the Hotwheels I could ever want. I started playing with it right away. I was so very happy! My aunt and I have always been very close, as far back as I can remember; perhaps that Christmas started our close relationship. I can always count on her to be there for me, and I know she always has my back. She is incredibly supportive, caring, fun, and sweet!

My aunt looks like she stepped out of a fashion magazine. She is of medium height. Her hair is almost shoulder length, medium to light brown. If I meet her after she gets out of work or if we are going out for dinner, she is dressed to the nines, very classy and business-like. Everything she wears looks brand new, from her high heel shoes, her pressed slacks, to her gorgeous, brightly colored blouse, which matches her beautiful face. She has a very exquisite and expensive collection of jewelry, which she carefully chooses just the right amount to wear. I

especially like when she wears the gold cross I got her for Christmas; it was the most unique one I saw. It has embossed rose color along parts of the front, very pretty, and she loved it. Her nails are always perfectly manicured and painted. Even when she wears sandals, you can see how her toenails match her fingernails. When I give her a great, big hug, I always get a great, big hug back, and it just feels great! Not like sometimes when you may give someone a great hug, and theirs is kind of limp. She always smells clean. If she wears perfume, she doesn't bathe herself in it. If she was something edible, it would be a piece of candy because she is so sweet. With all her great advice and support, when she speaks, she sounds like an angel to me.

Supportive should be her middle name: whenever I need her, she is always there for me. Just recently, before I started going to college, we were talking on the phone and she said, "You're so smart, you're going to do great. It's going to be such a great experience for you!" This really got me excited to start college! When I was having marital problems, I had to go over her house to see and speak to her, and cry on her shoulder a bit. She told me while she was giving me a hug, "You never have to worry honey. I'll always be there for you." With that and all the great advice she gave me, when I left her house, I felt better. My aunt is a great model of support, and I try to be as supportive to everyone that I know, just like she is.

Coming from an Italian family, we are all very caring and affectionate, but my aunt goes above and beyond. I'm sure it's not just in Italian families, but if you watch shows and movies like *The Sopranos* or *Goodfellas*, you will see all the hugging and kissing. It just seems like an Italian thing to me. What else says "caring" in Italian families? Food, and lots of it! Every time I go over my aunt's, I hear, "Are you hungry honey? You want something to eat?" We always hug and kiss each other every time we see a family member, and even close friends. When I was sick and stuck in bed, my aunt called me on the

phone and asked me if I needed any food, medicine or anything; she does this whenever I'm sick. When I'm down, she picks me up, gives me advice, tells of her own personal experiences that I can connect to, and does whatever she has to do to make me feel better. I find that incredibly caring. It is so nice to know that whatever I need, I just have to reach out and ask, or in my aunt's case, she asks me. Along with the hugs and kisses I get, her caring is like gold to me. I strive to be just as caring as she is with me, with my nieces, nephews, and everyone in my life.

We have so much fun when we get together; she is a blast! My aunt is one of those people who can make you laugh so much that your stomach hurts. One day we went to a beautiful beach up in Maine. I spent the day laying in the sun. She spent the day under the umbrella with SPF 50 sunscreen on, with a big hat to block the sun; she's funny like that. There was a great restaurant right on the beach, so we left most of our stuff where we were and went. We had cocktails and appetizers while watching the amazing surroundings, talking, telling jokes, and having more drinks. Another fond, fun memory was the time we went to a restaurant in Woburn for my birthday. It was a really cool place that served exotic foods like kangaroo and ostrich. We brought our own wine, two bottles, which we finished that night. I believe it took us like two hours, because we took our time. We ordered an appetizer, and told the waiter, "We're not going to order dinner right away. We're going to order a few appetizers, one at a time, and then dinner." I think he thought we were pains, but we didn't care. We were having fun. No matter where we are, she is just so much fun; I always have a great time! Maybe that's why I'm a lot of fun; I learned it by watching and being with her.

It takes almost an act of God for my aunt to say anything negative about anyone, because she is one of the sweetest people I know. She always tries to look for the good in people, and not focus on the negative qualities. I swear, the only thing she would say about Hitler is that he had a

nice mustache! You may know people, maybe acquaintances, friends, or even relatives who talk about others in a bad light frequently. Well, there's a good chance they're also talking bad about you. Anyone associated with my aunt never has to worry about that! I believe that empathy has a lot to do with being sweet and she has a lot of this. I never have to worry about telling her anything. I know she won't judge me; she will be kind and understanding. When I was facing the prospect of losing one of my teeth, toward the front of my mouth, I was pretty bummed about it. I didn't want to look like a hillbilly. I had a root canal and couldn't afford to have them cap it, and it had been just over a year. Well, the root canal started to break apart and I was trying not to eat on that side of my mouth. Just casually having a conversation with my aunt, telling her the whole situation, she unexpectedly said, "I'll pay for it. I don't want you to lose your tooth." I couldn't believe just how sweet that offer was! She is just an amazing, sweet person, and I would give my eye-teeth to be as sweet!

I've been told by a few different friends that, when they hear me speak to my aunt, I just light up, and this is why. My aunt has so many great qualities; these are just a few that have shaped me into the person I am today. Knowing just how much she has helped me, I try to show these same qualities to others in my life to help them. My aunt's support, caring, sweetness, and the fun times with her have certainly made things in my life better and easier to take. Having this kind of support is amazing, and I love her very, very much!

Suzanne Eaton

Basic Writing

Person Essay

October 17, 2013

My Baby Boy

It all started in the summer of 1993; I was sixteen years old. I gave birth to a 7 lb. 12 oz. baby boy, who I named Moises Cruz III. Not only is my son's name special because it is the same as his father's but it is also part of the Bible. My nickname for Moises is Momo, but everyone else calls him Moe or Little Joker. To me he's not just my son, he's my best friend. Moises has a great personality. He is strong, loving, artistic and has a wonderful sense of humor, which always makes him special to me.

My son Moises is a very handsome young man. He is now twenty years old. For a few years he was always worried about growing. He had a fear of being short, but once he turned fifteen he hit his growth spurt and turned out to be taller than me. He's 5'7" now and is thin but a muscular thin. Moises has hazel eyes and very short dark brown hair. His eyebrows are thick, which blends in well with his long eyelashes. When Moe was three years old, he had the chickenpox. His chickenpox was so intense that I had to make sure I was around him all the time, so he wouldn't keep scratching himself so much. The chickenpox left a scar on his forehead. Just this year Moe decided he wanted to get a tattoo. He got my nickname "Suzy" and his dad's nickname "Moe" on his wrists; I thought that was something special. He also has two other tattoos: "Lil Joker" on one forearm and "Lil Moe" on the other; those are his nicknames from family and friends. Moises isn't the type of person you would see wearing a suit and tie, unless we have a function to go to. He loves his sneakers, long shorts and

sweaters; whatever makes him comfortable is what you will see him wearing, especially his hooded sweatshirts.

The one quality in Moises that I will never forget is his strength of character. In 1997, I was nineteen and Moises was four years old. We were on our way to Boston to bring a friend of mine home. Driving on Highway 93, we had a very bad accident. My car was hit by three other cars, and then we hit the guardrail head on. Right then I saw my life flash before my eyes; I would have passed out from the impact, but all I could hear was Moises screaming, "Mommy, Mommy help me!" I was crying; I wanted to hold my baby.

"I'm right here, Baby. Someone is here to help us. I'm not going anywhere," I replied. Moises was hurt so badly, and all I wanted to do was hold him in my arms and make him all better. My son was sent by helicopter to Boston Medical Center, where he was on life support and in critical condition for weeks. I was sent to another hospital, when all I wanted to do was be with my son. I didn't care about myself; I just cared about him and if he was going to be okay. Moe suffered from a fractured skull and neck, and torn ligaments in his shoulder. As soon as I was let out of the hospital myself, I went to the hospital where he was right away to be by his side. I would always tell him how much I love him and how strong he is. He had stopped breathing and the nurses had put him on life support, which was the scariest thing in the world for me. It was already bad enough that I had to watch my baby boy be in so much pain. I wished it was me at that time. I didn't know what to do with myself but to pray that Moises would gain the strength he needed to get through this. He was on all kinds of tubes and machines for a week, but each day throughout that week he was doing better and becoming stronger. It was as if he had heard my prayer. I bought Moe a bear from the gift shop at Boston Medical Center and made sure every day, several times a day, I kissed Moe and his bear. He still has that bear, and it

reminds both of us of how strong he is and what he overcame. His strength has showed me that no matter what the obstacle I encounter, I should stay positive, fight, and never give up.

Moises is loveable with me. He doesn't live with me now, but he makes sure that every few days he calls me to make sure I am doing all right and I am healthy. He always makes sure to say he loves me and his little brother. Growing up, Moe was always by my side; he always hugged me and would play with my hair at naptime or when it was time for him to go to bed at night. He had to be near me to feel my presence for him to fall asleep. I thought that was just the cutest thing ever. I still have a letter that Moises wrote me in the sixth grade expressing how special I was to him and how much he loved and appreciated me for all that I had done as a single parent. It was so touching. I cried, but I was happy at the same time. That letter is a constant reminder for me of how loving Moises is. He makes me feel that even though I raised him alone, he loves me for all that I have accomplished. His love is my inspiration and always makes me work harder and move forward in life.

Moises has a very artistic mind. He loves to draw. He would draw all different kinds of things. It was always the way he put the detail into his drawings that made them unique. I remember when he was seven years old, he came home from school so excited to show me a drawing. "Mom, in art class today, I drew a special picture for you," he said.

"You did Momo? Well, let me see it," I replied. It was a picture of myself and Moises on a bright sunny day walking in the park. He was holding my hand, and we were walking three dogs. We didn't have any animals at the time, so I guess that was a hint that he wanted a dog. Moe's drawing had so much detail about us and the park. That day, I knew that as the years went on Moises would accomplish anything he put his mind to. I have a lot of pictures that Moises

has drawn during his childhood. Being artistic has always been a great quality that Moises has. I often look at all the pictures he has made me growing up. Those pictures make me think of all the memories behind them, and how proud he has made me.

As the years go by and I think about all the struggles I have encountered being a single parent, I think of Moises and his sense of humor and how it has helped me through my battles. Moises loves to play pranks just so he can see me smile and hear me laugh. He has to see me smile and if I'm not smiling, he will make sure I do. Whenever I seem down, he says "Yo, Mom Dukes, I love you." He always says it with a funny face, and every time he makes me laugh. Moe always has a way of being funny whether it is his facial expressions or just saying something that doesn't make any sense, or even fooling around with his little brother. I always tell him he should be a comedian. "Yeah, I am your comedian. I'm your personal comedian," he says. When my son is around, he lights up the whole room with his laughter. I hope that when he has children, they will have the same sense of humor as he does. Whenever I feel sad or I am having a bad day, all I have to do is think of my son and his funny ways. His humor will get me through those tough days.

I am proud of my son and the man he is today. I may have had him at an early age in life but to me that was a blessing. That made me a better person. Moises' strength, love, artistic mind, and humor have driven me to accomplish my goals and still drive me to become more and more optimistic every day. Because of Moises, I know that there is nothing that I cannot overcome. Moises has inspired me to work hard and never give up. No matter what age he is, Moises will always be my wonderful, handsome baby boy.

Edna Juliet Colon

Basic Writing

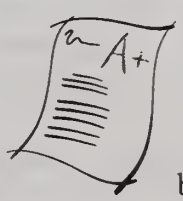
Narrative Essay

October 11, 2013

Step Toward my Future

The United States has always been referred to as the land of opportunity. No one ever mentioned that those opportunities require hard work, taking risks and learning to deal with change. After coming to the United States from Colombia in 2009 and living two years in New York with my godparents, I experienced a lot of difficult moments. I was so overwhelmed and I felt so unhappy. When I was seventeen years old, I felt that it was time for me to make a new decision. It was either stay in the same place and be unhappy, or take the risk to move to another place and start a new life, far away from problems and bad people. Little did I know that the decision that I made would change my life forever.

In 2011 I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life. I will never forget that day. It was a hot, sunny day in August in Queens, New York. Two days before, I had had a big argument with my godparents, Liliana and Eyvar. It took place in a small house on the fourth floor in an old building in Flushing, New York. The reason for the fight was that they thought very differently from me, and they wanted me to be like them. They wanted to control my life. I was new to this country, trying to learn a new language and understand a new culture. The



problems in my house slowed my progress. I had perfect grades, but my godparents were never satisfied with anything that I did. I was thinking about the proposition that my

stepmother in Lawrence had made months before. She had asked me to go to live with her. However, I was in a relationship with James. He was the only person that was supportive to me at one of the most difficult moments in my life. He was the only one that could understand my sadness.

On the day I made the decision, I woke up earlier than usual, and I thought multiple times about what I was going to say to my godmother. I was afraid to talk, but what else could I do? It was the only way that I could change my life and relieve my tension. A long time before, I had stopped being a little girl, and I had begun to take responsibility for all that I did. I was practically by myself, and my mother was thousands of miles away from me. I didn't have anyone that could talk for me. So I decided to talk for myself. I stood outside my godmother's bedroom door and said, "Liliana I want to talk to you."

"Yes tell me," she said.

"I have made the decision to move to Massachusetts with Ana, my stepmother," I told her.

Liliana was astonished and spoke with a loud voice. "What! And why do you want to do that? You are fine here," she replied.

"I believe I need to change my environment. I'm too overwhelmed. We have really different personalities. I believe I cannot continue living here," I said.

"Okay, if that's what you want," she said.

When I finally said what I wanted to, I was so relieved. My godmother wasn't happy with my decision, but it was what I wanted. Also, I had my mother's permission.

The next step was to tell my boyfriend about the decision that I had made. I saw him the day after I made my decision. "Baby, I want to tell you something," I said.

"What happened, my love," he replied.

"I finally made the decision of moving to Lawrence with Ana, my stepmother," I said.

James immediately said with a sad voice, "Wow, I didn't expect this day would finally come."

"I know it's going to be hard for us to be far away, but I promise you that I will do everything to stay together," I told him.

"Ok Julie, I know this will change your life, but never forget that I love you," he said.

James was happy for me, because he knew what problems I had had with my godparents and how uncomfortable I was. At the same time, he felt sad because I was going far away, and he didn't know what would happen with our relationship. It had been a hard decision because I wanted to be with him, but at the same time I wanted to have a better life. For this reason saying goodbye to him was the hardest thing for me.

This event was important to me because it gave me a new perspective to see new opportunities and to realize how the decision that I made could change my life. I could have changed for the better, or I could have made a mistake and learned from it. When I started my life with my stepmother here in Lawrence, I was so happy, and finally I felt free. I believe that it was the best decision that I have ever made, even though it was hard to find new friends and adapt to a new place. The positive outcomes from my decision were that I learned more English, and it was easier for me to concentrate on my studies. I became an excellent student. I graduated with honors from high school with a high GPA, and I received many scholarships. Even though I passed through a lot of difficulties, I achieved those goals, and I have been able to go to college. I believe this was one step toward my future, and I believe many more good things are about to come.

From this experience, I learned that life is about being persistent and never giving up. In order to be successful, I knew what I wanted, and I was really scared. But I did it, and I learned from it. In her book, *Life Lessons*, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote, "Going through hardship is like being a rock in a tumbler. You're tossed to and fro and get bruised, but you come out more polished and valuable than ever" (222). Kubler-Ross is so right. I felt like a rock in a tumbler because I was trapped in a place where I was uncomfortable. I was surrounded by criticisms and judgments. Even though all this bruised me and made me feel lonely, it gave me the strength to take the risk to confront my problem. As a result, I believe I have become a polished and valuable person. Now I'm a determined person that fights without stopping in order to achieve what I want. I never regret it, because life always gives me rewards for my hard work. Even though a lot of things can happen during a lifetime, I view all this as a lesson that made me stronger and more mature. Through all my challenges in my recent transition, I have learned to appreciate all experiences and lessons. Each challenge has improved my attitude and perspective on life and has taught me how to be a much stronger and better person.

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Nour Darwich

Basic Writing

Narrative Essay

Oct. 23, 2013

Powerfully Foreign

It was a sunny morning in Damascus, Syria. The time was somewhere in between the months of January and December. I was a little foreign girl from the USA, in the third grade. The third grade is usually the time you start to learn more advanced mathematics, specifically multiplication. In this school that I was in, every class had one teacher. In addition to the one teacher, there was a mathematics teacher who went around to all the classes and gave lessons. My class was large, with about 60 students. This mathematics teacher came around every week, but there was this one time that she would probably never forget. I knew I was a foreign girl in this school, but little did I know how powerful I was to be an American in another country.

Out of all things I can and cannot remember vividly, I remember this day like it was yesterday. The mathematics teacher that visited the classrooms weekly was in my class for the day. I can't remember what she was wearing, but as a child I thought she was very evil-looking. The way she spoke was mean and her personality wasn't very pleasant. Hitting students was normal in schools in this country, but the teacher I had was very nice and calm, and hit students very rarely. She also never hit me because I was one of the top students and she loved me. But this mathematics teacher did not really know any of the students; she just gave the lessons. Anyway, it was our first multiplication lesson. She wrote the first problem on the board. I can't remember what it was exactly, but about 97% of the class got it wrong, including me. She then moved on and did two more problems. I got those right, but some others in the class got it wrong.

When we finished the three problems and she had explained how to do them, she stood up and said, "If you got any one of the three problems wrong, stand up and you will be hit on your hand." We were going to be hit to learn a lesson, but what I didn't understand is why we had to be taught by being hit when she had already explained to us how to do the problems anyway. I thought that was enough. But no, she had other thoughts. About 99% of the class stood up. This was our very first time learning multiplication; of course we were going to make mistakes. I remember everyone in the class, including myself, having tears in their eyes from fear of how much it was going to hurt. It was most dreadful for me because I was at the front of the class and she started from the back. She had more than fifty students' hands to hit, and I was one of the last. The wait felt like it was taking forever. Then she finally got to me. "Give me your hand," she demanded. I gave her my left hand. She held it from the tip of my fingers with one hand, and with her other hand, slammed her wooden stick onto the palm of my hand. This stick was a thick metal surrounded by wood on the outside. The pain was stingingly painful. I sat down crying from pain as she moved on to my friends sitting next to me. I remember looking up at my teacher to see her turned away from the class with a face that said, "I wouldn't have done this."

I can't remember what had happened after she left, but on the bus ride home I had gotten over it. I had stopped crying long ago, even though it was still stinging. I've gotten hit previously by other Syrian teachers in the past, but it would be a much less violent hit, not as painful, and certainly not with a metal stick. The teacher would just tap our hands with a wooden stick to just let us know that what we had done was bad, but this mathematics teacher that I had was like no other.

I rang the doorbell to my house. My mother opened it and saw me holding my hand that was red. She saw me touching it and asked me, "What's wrong? Why is your hand red? What happened?"

I went inside and told her, "The mathematics teacher hit me and the whole class."

Then my dad walked in the room, hearing everything from the kitchen. "Why did she hit all of you?" he asked.

"Because we were learning multiplication, and whoever got at least one out of the three wrong got hit."

"How many did you get wrong?"

"Only one out of the three," I replied.

"And she hit you because of one?"

"Yeah."

"That's not right. I'll go to the principal tomorrow morning and tell her about this."

My mom still standing with us asked, "Is it hurting you?"

"Yeah! It's stinging!" I complained.

"You shouldn't have let her hit you."

I didn't understand back then how I would stand up to a teacher to stop her from hitting me. Like Michael Oher said in *I Beat the Odds,* "Grown-ups always got their way. We just had to make do with whatever decisions were made for us" (35). No one dared to speak up, or in disrespect, to stop the teacher from hitting them.

The next morning I was sitting in class when the announcement came on and asked for me to go to the principal's office. The whole class heard and started assuming bad things. I

assumed badly with them and walked out of the class with a confused look on my face. The walk to the principal's office was dreadful; I remember it clearly. The school was literally in a square shape: an empty middle where recess and gym class were held, and the classrooms lined up on the perimeter. I remember walking to the principal's office looking down at the tiled floor the whole time, trying to remember if I had done anything wrong. I couldn't think of anything; *I'm a great student and I don't do bad things, so what could it be?* I thought. I didn't realize I was there until I was only about five feet away from the door. At this point, from my fear, I thought of running back to my class, but that didn't make sense. "Just go in and see why you're needed," I thought to myself. I walked up the three stairs and knocked on the door. "Come in!" the principal said from inside. As I remember, this principal was very plain looking, except she actually did look like a principal; her posture and attitude fit her position. Because this was an Arab school, she wore a hijab but still showed some of her hair in the front. So I walked in and saw her shaking in what I realized later was fear.

She didn't even say "Hi" or ask how I was. "Nour! Please sit!" she said. That actually surprised me because as students we were not allowed to sit in the presence of the principal. So from my confusion I just looked at her. "It's okay, sit," she said when saw my reaction. So then I did, slowly. She went right to the point and said in a shaky voice, "Nour, honey, you didn't tell me you're American!" Even though she was shaking she was smiling nicely the whole time, and I thought that was awfully strange, since the teachers and principals were never this nice unless parents were around. But at that question I realized that my Dad actually had been here and told her about the previous day.

I responded to her question with a shrug, "I didn't know it was so important that I had to tell you." She then ordered her secretary to get me a glass of orange juice. That also I thought was strange. She was being strangely too nice.

When the juice came she said, "No, it is very important that you're American." As a third grader I didn't understand why and I thought it would be dumb to ask. I remember I stayed in her office for more than an hour talking. I don't remember what we talked about, but it was probably about that teacher from the previous day and what happened, and some conversations about my traveling back and forth to different countries. Then she let me go back to my class. On the way back to my class I should've walked like I was proud, and something big, but honestly I still didn't understand what was such a big deal about being American here.

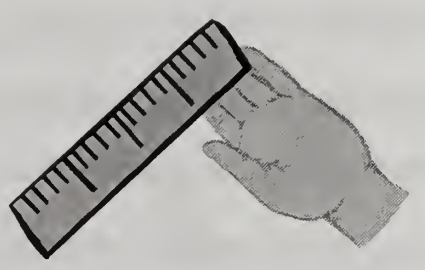
After school I went home and told my parents what happened. So I asked my dad, "Why is it such a big deal that I'm American?"

My dad laughed and replied, "Because when you're American here you have power. If a teacher hit you in the school, they think you have the power to shut down the whole school if you wanted to."

I didn't stay at the school for long after what happened because I was moving back to the USA. But for the month or two that I stayed, I assumed that mathematics teacher got fired because I never saw her again.

Little did I know how powerful it was to be an American in another country. Now that I am older I am aware. But back then when I was a child, I didn't understand the whole concept of having power just because you were from another country. No matter how many times I had it explained to me, I would not understand. Of course not; I was just a small child, too young to understand such a concept.

From this experience, I have learned that sometimes people are treated differently when they are known to be from another country. I believe that is wrong, but it is society. I think if I had understood it back then, I would feel more powerful than everybody else in my class. But even then I would know that that is unfair and wrong. All my life I have believed that everyone deserves to be treated fairly. Even now when I go back to Syria, even if it's not to go to school, I don't act as if I have so much power and I know it. I just go along with everybody else and try to be treated the same. Moreover, I am glad to say, the Syrians no longer hit the students in schools today like they did when I was a child. I guess someone spoke up about it and things changed. Maybe it was my school, or some other foreign student's parents, or even me and I don't even know it. Who knows?



Brian Huberdeau

Basic Writing

Narrative Essay

Nov.1, 2013

Beautiful Blue Eyes

On a cold February morning in 2005, I woke to the sound of my alarm clock ringing in my head. With the snooze button thankfully within reach, I managed to get another few minutes of rest. It was five o'clock in the morning, and I was getting up for another day at work. Half asleep, I got up out of bed, made coffee, and walked sideways to the bathroom. The aroma of a fresh cup of coffee now filled the air. I grabbed a cup and headed off to work. For the time, the morning was so normal it seemed like just another day. But within a few hours, this would be one of the most emotional and stressful days of my life.

When I received a phone call from my wife later that morning, I knew something wasn't right. My three-month-old daughter, Kaitlin, had been sick. She came down with a minor cold. The medication we received was not working, and she needed to go back to the doctor's. She hadn't gotten better, but worse. "Kate doesn't seem to be getting better with her medication, so I called and made an appointment with Doctor Boulanger today. I need you to come home and pick us up."

"Ok, I'm leaving now. I'll be home shortly."

Hearing the concern in her voice, I immediately left work and was on my way home. As I arrived home and entered the door, I noticed her things were right beside the door ready to be put in the car. It was a little after noon, and my daughter was in an infant car seat, ready to go, sucking on her Red Sox pacifier. I picked my daughter up out of the seat and held her. With a

kiss on her forehead, I wished I could make her feel better. Her blue eyes looked up to me as I held her in my arms. I was looking forward to spending time with her after her doctor's appointment, hoping she would be feeling better by then. It was something that I always looked forward to. I could tell right away she was not herself. She was pale and not moving much. As I put her in the car, I was getting concerned. She did not look very well.

We arrived at the doctor's office in Haverhill for her one-thirty appointment. We waited for a short time before being led into the examination room. When the doctor came in, she took her pulse and asked us what her symptoms were and how long she's had them. "How long has she been feeling like this? Has she had any medication today?"

"She took some medication this morning. She has a cough and sounds like she is wheezing. She will start to get better, but then she goes downhill as the medication wears off," my wife said as she ran her fingers through Kaitlin's hair.

"I want to give her something to see how she responds," she said as she listened to her heartbeat.

The doctor then gave her a nebulizer treatment. My daughter did not respond to the treatment. At that time, Doctor Boulanger informed us, "I really think she should go to the hospital. They have a good pediatrics center there that can treat her much better. They are better equipped than I am for something of this nature. I have called Lawrence General Hospital and they are aware that you will be bringing her in." This was concerning to me. If we needed to go to the hospital this was something more serious, but the doctor seemed to suggest that it was not.

After stopping at home to gather some things, we arrived at Lawrence General Hospital shortly after four in the afternoon. My wife and I started to get a little worried, although I was trying not to show it. We were led to yet another examination room. Her finger had an oxygen

sensor on to monitor her level. After a while, nurse after nurse came in to look at her. As her levels changed, more traffic came to our room. Each nurse would take her temperature and check her oxygen level. Then, after her levels decreased, one of the nurses attempted to give her an IV. Unsuccessful, she turned to another nurse. They still had trouble getting one in. Watching two nurses hold my daughter down while a third was inserting the IV into her little arm was really bothersome. She was screaming bloody murder. We felt helpless not being able to help our daughter. Her oxygen level had dropped, and she was now having trouble breathing. At one moment she even stopped breathing for a few seconds. *How can this be happening?* I thought to myself. She is only three months old! To make matters worse the doctor would come in and wouldn't say a word to us. "What the hell is going on here?" I lost it.

The nurse, hearing our frustration, mentioned, "Someone will be in to talk with you shortly," but then hurried out of the room and huddled with the other nurse and doctor.

"I think they mentioned Boston. Is that true?" My wife was visibly upset.

"I'm not sure I heard that, but someone better tell us something soon!"

When we finally spoke to the doctor they had indeed decided that she needed to go to Mass General Hospital in Boston. "She has had trouble breathing with a lot of congestion. She is stable right now, but we do not want to chance it." We could not believe what was happening to our baby girl. The paramedics eventually took her and put her in the ambulance. The paramedics let my wife ride in the ambulance with our daughter. I was going to follow behind.

"Do you know how to get to Mass General in Boston?" he said, securing Kaitlin in the back of the ambulance.

"No I do not," I replied.

"Follow behind me; you'll be fine," he said as he jumped behind the wheel.

That was easy for him to say. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night and it had started snowing out. I sprinted to my car and pulled up behind them. As I did they were heading off. It didn't seem like they were waiting around very long.

The ride to Boston following the ambulance seemed like it took forever. It was snowing hard at times, and with the snow on the highway, it was hard to keep up. At the time we both did not have cell phones, so I could not stay in touch with my wife. When we arrived at the hospital, I had to park in the parking garage, so by the time I parked they had gone inside. It would be a long twenty minutes before I would see my daughter next.

Walking into Mass General, I seemed lost. My daughter had arrived fifteen minutes ago and they were nowhere in sight. The receptionist helped guide me down to intensive care. The hallway seemed like a long white tunnel that would never end. It was a year before I came to the closed door to intensive care. As I attempted to enter, I was abruptly stopped. "Sir, can I help you?" a nurse said to me, waving her arms.

"Yes, I'm looking for my daughter Kaitlin. She just came through here," I panicked.

"Right this way," the nurse pointed to the location of my daughter.

She was in a small room with wires and hoses running from a couple machines to her. She was asleep with my wife right beside her. My heart dropped at the sight of her. Not knowing what to expect next, I sat down rubbing my hands over my eyes, exhausted from the events of the day. "How is she doing? Is she ok?" I just wanted to hold her.

"We just got in here, and the doctor has been in and out with no updates yet."

As we patiently waited for some good news, I looked up at the clock. It was now four in the morning. The room echoed the constant beep of Kaitlin's vital signs. My wife and I sat there like we were frozen in time, waiting for the moment the doctor or nurse would walk in. With her

under the watchful eyes of the medical staff, it was hard not to nod off, but with our daughter's condition we would not allow ourselves to. One moment I remember my wife saying, "Why don't you take a nap? If I hear something, I'll wake you."

"No, I'm ok; I want to wait for the doctor."

Almost at that moment, the doctor finally came in and looked her over one last time before finally giving us news that we wanted to hear. Our daughter was going to be OK! "She's going to be OK," the doctor said, with a slight grin on his face. "She is doing much better than when she had first arrived. It's a very good thing you brought her in when you did. She's had a rough night, but with some medication and some rest she will be OK."

Our daughter finally turned it around with the help of the medical staff. While we were all very thrilled, we still had to be cautious. She was diagnosed with a severe form of a respiratory virus they call RSV. She spent four more days at Mass General. She was finally discharged from Mass General after four days and was back to her normal self within a couple of weeks.

At times you may never know how much you really care about and love someone. When my daughter was at her worst moment, I felt absolutely paralyzed. As Angela Schwindt offers, "While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about." Looking back I realized how much more important it means to be with your family when they need you most. I certainly looked at my family much differently after that. My daughter is now eight years old and is quite the chatterbox. She loves music and can often be heard singing in her room. She has quite the set of lungs for an eight-year-old! Even though I have to sometimes speak to her when she doesn't listen or make the right choices, I will never forget how I felt that day and will always cherish the love for my daughter. She means the world to me.

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Caitlin Limoli

Writing Fusion

This I Believe Essay

March 26, 2014

Hard Work

Every day I wake up in a comfy bed in a beautiful house. It's all because my parents work so hard to provide these things for me. I sometime catch myself envying the people who get everything handed to them, and then I realize they probably don't even know the value of a dollar. I found that working for what I have is much more fulfilling than to get things handed to me.

I believe in hard work.

Although my parents are well off now, we were not always like that. When I was first born I was the third child in my family. My father would wake up every morning at 4 o'clock and do a paper route, then on top of that go to his second job as a shoe salesman just to pay for our livelihoods. He eventually worked his way up the ladder and now is the manager of the shoe company. He is one of the people to show me that working hard is the key to life.

By the time I was 16, my parents had great money, and we were fine financially, but my dad still made me get a job. I remember him saying, "We are not going to pay for you our whole lives." I was so bummed. I didn't want to give up time in my day to work and be bored, but I did what I was told and got my first job as a cashier at a local grocery store. When I got my first paycheck, I was excited to spend the money that I rightfully earned. When I got home that day with the check in my hand, my dad explained to me that I will take that check to the bank and deposit it in my savings account and

from now on for every other check I receive it will go into that account. I was mad! It was my money; I could do what I wanted with it, but again of course I did what my father said.

When I got to the age of 18, I let my brother take my car, a beat-up 1999 Nissan Maxima, to work, and he crashed it! I now needed a new car. I was upset that I was car-less. I didn't have enough money to pay for a new one. I then realized that I had a savings account that my father made me keep. I then decided to take a look to see how much I had. I couldn't believe my eyes; I had 10,000 dollars! Needless to say, the next day I was out looking for a new car.

Now I realized what all that hard work was for. In my life, I hope to share what my father has taught me. I try to always look at the greater picture and ask myself, "Is it worth it?" To this day I pretty much pay for everything myself. It's a good feeling to know that what I have is rightfully mine.

Elizabeth Hunter

Basic Writing

Media Essay

April 2, 2014

What Do You Mean, You Still Read Books?

In his book *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms our Lives*, Todd Gitlin writes, "the average child spent six hours and thirty-two minutes per day exposed to media of all kinds, of which the time spent reading books and magazines—not counting schoolwork—average about forty-five minutes" (18). This quote may be true for most families, but it is not true for mine. I spend at least two hours per day reading a book of my choosing. I also spend an hour and a half each day reading books to my children who are three and two. Through books we are developing a time every day where we sit down together and enjoy each other's company. Reading books allows me to escape from my sometimes uneventful day, creates a time that my children and I spend together regularly, and brings entertainment to me no matter where I am in the city.

I escape into a different world and time when I settle into my couch, pull on my blanket, and open my book to the last page I left off. I am currently reading *A Storm of Swords* by George R. R. Martin. This book takes me to a land where winter lasts for years and one king rules over seven kingdoms. My everyday life is quite simple. I wake up, get my kids ready, drop them off with their grandma, and then head to work. I don't do much out of the ordinary unless it is my gym day or the day I have my evening class at school. When I am reading a book my uneventful day turns into dragons, sword fights, and battles for the throne. I love that through the writer's words I can be transported from my soft green couch in my living room to a battleship roaring

down a river to fight down an invading force. Sometimes I escape into stories about a young man trying to find his personal legend or books about young wizards learning magic and defeating their arch enemy. I mostly enjoy books that are made into movies, television shows, or plays, such as Matthew Quick's *The Silver Linings Playbook,* and *The Help,* written by Kathryn Stockett. If I know that there is a book that a play or movie is based on, I try to read the book first to see if the other form of media fits into the perception that I had of the story. Sometimes it does, and I find it interesting that the take I had on the book someone else has had too. But mostly the way I perceived the book and the perception of the director differ greatly, and I find myself re-reading the book to see how or why the director may have gone a different route.

In addition to reading for my own enjoyment, I also spend time each day reading to my children. While the books I read on my own help me escape my everyday life, the books I read with my children create a common activity for us to do together while teaching them vocabulary and the joy of reading. Usually after dinner Anthony, Margaret, and I sit on the floor and read together. This part of the night is one of my favorites. I enjoy reading books so much, and I want my children to enjoy them as well. I don't want them to look at reading as something that is done only in school, but as a tool to build vocabulary and imagination. I want them to see me reading during my free time, and to want to do it on their own as well. I believe that reading to them each night opens up a time where we can have dialogue without the background noise of the television as a distraction. In hopes to pull them away from the television I buy books that have the same characters as their favorite shows, like *The Octonauts* books by Meomi. I try to make reading with them as fun as possible by tickling them on punctuation words or using different voices for the different characters. Since I have been reading to them on a daily basis, I no longer have to

ask them to get a book after dinner. Now after we eat they run to their bookshelf and each pick as many books as they can carry. We read books about learning letters, numbers, and colors, and even though they are having a great time while I tickle and make funny voices, I know they are learning from the content of the book.

Another reason why I like reading is because whether I am at home, on my lunch break at work, or on the train I am always able to read. Between the normal form of a book, audio books, and e-readers, I can take a book with me anywhere. I tend to stick to paperback books because I enjoy the smell of them, and I like the act of turning the page. If I am on the go or traveling, I usually have an audiobook downloaded to listen to. Most of the books that I have paperback versions of, I also have the audio version of. Having both formats allows me the flexibility of reading the book when I have time to sit down, but I am also able to listen to it while I cook or while driving to work. While I am on my lunch break from work, instead of sitting down after eating lunch and opening the book I am reading, I plug in my headphones and go for a walk while I listen to the audio version of the book. By listening to the audio book on my break, I am able to go for a walk and stay in motion.

Even though I think that reading is extremely beneficial for my vocabulary and imagination, I think it should be limited to a specific amount of time per day. Along with all forms of media, it can keep me sitting in the same spot for too long and cause me to miss things that are going on in the world around me. While reading is a healthy exercise for my mind, I think it is important to limit the activity and make time for interacting with the world around me. Sometimes when I get into a book it is really hard to put it down and make time for other things in life, so I try to put a timer on so that I don't sit still for longer than two hours. If I have had a very physical day and have spent some quality time with my loved ones, I do give myself some

extra time for reading. But it is very important to me to make sure I find the balance between sitting with my nose in a book and interacting with the people around me.

Reading is a form of escape from a boring day, a way to build conversation and knowledge with my children, and a form of entertainment for me no matter where I am. Whether it is a how-to book, a book on classic literature, or an action adventure, reading has expanded my vocabulary, knowledge, and imagination. Through reading I have opened up my mind to new ideas, and I am able to view things from another perspective. While I think everyone should sit down and read at some point during the day, I think it is also important that everyone get out and enjoy the world around them. Reading can give you a thousand ideas on things you can do in the world, but it's also important to get out and do them!

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Robely Castillo

Basic Writing

Media Essay

November 5, 2013

Peaceful Melodies

Have you ever heard a song and remembered something from your past? Music can bring you back to that moment in life when your heart skipped a beat. In my case, music brings things to life. Without it, I wouldn't be able to begin many of the simple routines we have in our everyday lives. Music is important in my life because it entertains me when I am alone or bored, helps me remember special events that have happened in my life, and motivates me to complete everyday tasks.

I use music as media in my everyday life. It's a relationship that started when I was about six years old. I would hear music whenever my mom and I were at home and she was cleaning or cooking. I learned to love and appreciate all the beautiful ballads and romantic songs she listened to. And after I turned twelve and received my first CD player, I used it for things like falling asleep or whenever I was sad. I would put on my headphones and forget where I was or who was around. It was just me and my favorite songs. I started to make play lists for different things I did throughout the day, like a gym play list, a going-to-sleep play list, or a romantic play list.

Listening to music entertains me when I am bored or feeling down. Every year when my family and I get together we listen to music and dance all night long. Last year for Christmas, we all got together and made delicious Dominican dishes. But all wasn't well until we turned on the radio and started playing some of our favorite songs. As soon as we heard those songs by Antony Santos, we started to dance around and everyone seemed happier. It was like someone had hit the

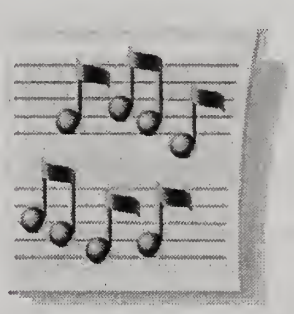
fun switch and all the frowns turned upside down. Music inspires me to stand up and forget all the problems I have, even if it's for a couple of minutes.

Music brings back beautiful memories. There are songs out there that when you hear them you immediately start thinking of someone or something. For example, every time I hear that bachata called, "Tu secreto" by Elvis Martinez, it reminds me of my teenage years. When I was thirteen, I fell in love with this boy from across the street. This happened in the Dominican Republic while I was on vacation with my parents. It was love at first sight, and neither of us knew it was something that would take us to limits we didn't know were possible. The boy's name was Alvaro, and his dad owned a grocery store across the street from my grandmother's house. Every morning and afternoon he would play that song for me. Now whenever I hear it, I immediately space out and remember all our sweet moments together. They are flashbacks that make my heart feel warm and happy.

Getting chores and everyday tasks done wouldn't be possible without music. Whenever I am at home cleaning or cooking, I have to have music on. When I wake up in the morning, my phone is already connected to some speakers and ready to play my favorite tunes. When I hear music in the morning, it makes me wake up in a good mood. Cleaning that bathtub wouldn't be possible without my cleaning play list. It helps me finish chores quicker and with more enthusiasm. I would bet a lot of people I know hate doing chores or completing simple tasks, like taking your kids to school. If they had music playing while they did this, it would encourage them to do it while in a happier state of mind. I know, in my case, I cannot do any of these things without a rhythm to keep me going. While I fold clothes in my room, I dance to the rhythm of bachatas and merengues. By my side my daughter moves her hips from side to side saying, "Dance mommy dance!"

However, music is also used in our society as a form of expression, and not always in a good way. It can be used to insult a group of people or bring about negative words and styles that the young see and get accustomed to. Our children watch music videos and listen to music that might have a negative influence on them. As parents, we need to watch out for this and be very attentive to what they are listening to and how it might be changing them. Music should be used in a beautiful and creative way and not to express one's hate. For that reason, I recommend that the next generation watch what they are listening to and what purpose it has in their lives.

In conclusion, music is the most important media in my life today. To me and those around me, music helps us express ourselves and our culture. Every melody I keep in my heart brings a memory and a feeling. Without it all my errands and cleaning sessions would be boring and pointless. I know in my life, music is a peaceful melody that helps me look at life in a positive way.



Alaina Marino

Basic Writing

Opinion Essay

Fall 2013

Supporting the So-Called Soda Ban

The New York State Supreme Court recently overturned a law that would have banned the sale of extra-large sodas in New York City theatres, restaurants, and stadiums. However, in spite of being overruled, this law may pass regardless. Although I am from Massachusetts, and I have only once visited New York City, I support this law. The reasons why I support this so-called soda ban are the apathy shown by the soda industry, the effects soda has on children, and the rise of health care costs due to preventable illnesses.

The soda industry, as mentioned above, has consistently turned a blind eye to the obesity epidemic, choosing to ignore the very real problems soda causes. Michael Mudd, who worked in the soda industry for twenty years, notes that the soda industry has "sought refuge in the fact that the obesity epidemic has many causes. It has insistently used that fact to fight off government regulators and justify why it should not have to change what it sells or how it sells it" (Mudd). While it is true that soda is not solely to blame for the obesity epidemic, the soda industry has denied it has done anything wrong, instead trying to cast the blame on other causes. If an entire industry has shown complete apathy towards the problems that its products contribute to, then why is merely banning large sodas a concern? After all, the so-called soda ban would not prevent a person from buying soda altogether; it would merely prevent them from buying the larger sizes.

Another reason I support the ban is because of the negative effects soda has on children. Children are more vulnerable to advertisements than adults and are less likely to understand the

health risks of a product. According to Morgan Spurlock, the director and star of *Super Size Me*, the average teen in America "drinks two or more 12-ounce sodas a day. How much sugar is in a single 12-ounce soda? Ten teaspoons. *That kid is consuming the equivalent of twenty teaspoons of sugar every day.* Just in soda" (Spurlock 25). That sugar can add up quickly, especially since sugar isn't as obvious in soda as it is in food, and an excess of sugar is associated with type 2 diabetes (insulin resistance). This form of diabetes, once rarely seen, has become more commonplace today. Although it would be one thing if the obesity epidemic only affected adults, it has become simply tragic since children are affected as well.

The final reason I support the ban is because of the rising cost of health care. Preventable diseases, such as the aforementioned type 2 diabetes, are on the rise, and are usually the result of a poor diet. Mark Bittman, a senior food writer for *The New York Times*, notes "One could argue that after tobacco, sodas just might be the biggest killers via preventable disease in the country. Yet as 32 ounces seems to be the new normal, so does death by preventable disease. Think about what the word 'preventable' means for a moment" (Bittman). Only tobacco causes more deaths than obesity-related illnesses a year, and both are completely preventable. "Preventable" means that something can be avoided or averted. Is thirty-two ounces of soda a day worth getting one of those very preventable illnesses and ending up in an early grave? You (probably) avoid tobacco products, so you could very easily do the same with large sodas.

I support Mayor Bloomberg's so-called soda ban because it is taking a proactive approach to one of the biggest causes of the obesity epidemic, in one of the country's most-hit and most populous cities. It could force people to think twice about buying large quantities of soda, but it could also shock the apathetic soda industry, reduce the amount of sick children, and

lower the cost of health care. Although it is true that the obesity epidemic has more than one cause, this law is tackling one of the biggest causes: soda.

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TezMariah Cole

Basic Writing

Opinion Essay

November 26, 2013

A Work In Progress

I'm not a high school dropout, and I'm happy to say that. I live in New Hampshire, where the dropout age is 18, which is a good thing. In Massachusetts the dropout age is currently 16. However, Massachusetts is planning to raise it to 18. When I graduated with my class, it was a great feeling. I felt like I accomplished something amazing, which I did. Not only was it a great feeling, but going to school every day was fun. For young teens, spending time with friends and learning new things to prepare them for the future are important. The whole high school experience is worth it, especially in the long run. Teens should stay in school and learn to succeed later in life. There are so many good reasons why the dropout age should be raised to 18.

First, eighteen year olds are more mature than sixteen-year-olds. More maturity leads to better decision making. Most sixteen-year-olds usually don't know what they want to do in life at that very moment. So dropping out of high school is not the best thing for them. Sixteen-year-olds need the education in high school to help them prepare for the future and what they want to do later in life. In the article, "Raising Compulsory School Age Requirements: A Dropout Fix?" it states, "most students regret the decision" (1). What the article says is true. If a sixteen-year-old does drop out, he or she will probably regret the decision later in life. At the age of sixteen, not everything is always figured out. My dad was a high school dropout. He now has a good paying job and does well, but he regrets his decision. I know he regrets his decision because he

won't actually tell me he dropped out. He's embarrassed. At eighteen, a student will know more of what he wants in life that will help him succeed in the future.

Second, employment opportunities are more limited for sixteen-year-olds than eighteen-year-olds. At the age of sixteen a teen can get a job, but not like an eighteen-year-old. A lot of jobs require a person to be age eighteen in order to do certain things, for example, dealing with certain machines, and selling alcohol and tobacco. A person has to be eighteen in some stores and states in order to sell those products and work on that equipment. According to John Sofias Scheft, Esq. in the *Juvenile Law Massachusetts Police Manual*, "certain occupations and equipment are hazardous to minors under age of 18" (14-4). Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are not allowed to work more than six days per week, or more than 48 hours per week. Also, a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old is not allowed to work before 6:00 a.m. or after 10:00 p.m. (Scheft 2). So when a teen is sixteen and they drop out of high school, finding a job will be very tough. At eighteen, the person will have more opportunities, and he or she will probably have a better job that can support them.

Furthermore, sixteen-year-olds are not considered legal for other important life choices, in the way eighteen-year-olds are. The life choices are voting, joining the service, buying their own home, and even marriage. Eighteen-year-olds have more responsibilities than sixteen-year-olds; therefore sixteen-year-olds shouldn't be able to drop out of high school. If they dropped out of high school, they probably wouldn't be able to take on the world head on or be allowed to do much in order to get anywhere in life because they're too young. In the article "Happy 18th Birthday, New Adult," Jackie Burrell, writes that "an 18 year old is considered an adult in nearly every state in the union." One example is that, at age sixteen, if a teen has been convicted of a criminal offense, then he or she would get a stern lecture from the police and would need

parental supervision (Burrell). At eighteen, if the person has been convicted of a criminal offense, he or she would be taken to court and/or put in jail. Most sixteen-year-olds are not ready to take on big responsibilities like an eighteen-year-old is.

There are many people who would disagree with me on the minimum dropout age being raised to eighteen. Everyone has their own opinion, which is important, and I understand that. What I don't understand is how a young teen at the age of sixteen can have the right to drop out of high school. People who support the minimum dropout age of sixteen say that students leave because of "problems at home, persistent poor performance, personal crises, unstable school conditions, and boredom" (Wolk 4). None of those reasons are good enough or acceptable. A

student should be going to school to better his life, and to be able to support his family in the future. Being bored in school is a poor excuse, and not a good enough reason to leave. If a student is bored, he or she should find something that interests him or her and should make things more interesting. Regardless of what other people think, the minimum dropout age should be raised to eighteen because it's the right thing to do for students and their future.

If more sixteen-year-olds keep dropping out of high school, then we will have more people getting less of an education, and they will probably be struggling their whole lives. Leaving high school at sixteen is too young and is unacceptable. Teens that age are not old enough to know what they want to do in life and should stay in school. If they stay in school, it will better themselves and their families. Going to school, and actually staying, can open up some big opportunities and better their future. For all these reasons, I strongly believe that the minimum high school dropout age should be raised to eighteen.

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Stefanie Almodovar

Basic Writing

Opinion Essay

May 6, 2014

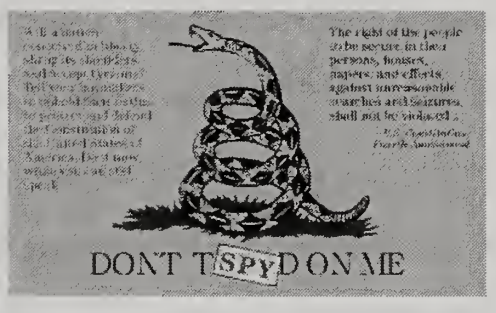
An American Hero

Edward Snowden was working for the National Security Agency (N.S.A.). He has been known as a traitor or hero throughout the country. Edward Snowden stole thousands of classified documents from the government. Snowden spent months studying each individual document and then revealed to the public about the N.S.A. surveillance programs. He revealed that the government is monitoring phone calls, emails, and even social networks of millions of people in the United States. Using intercepts, the government is able to get our emails, passwords, phone records, and credit cards. Snowden soon fled out of the country, on the run from the government for breaking the law. In my opinion, I think Edward Snowden is a hero because he has brought to light important information that deserved to be in public, the surveillance program is likely a violation of the Fourth Amendment, and no military operations were involved.

First of all, Edward Snowden has performed a great public service by bringing to light important information that deserved to be in the public. In the article, "Why Edward Snowden is a Hero," John Cassidy states, "First, they confirmed that the U.S. government, without obtaining any court warrants, routinely collects the phone logs of tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, of Americans who have no links to terrorism whatsoever" (2). This statement of John Cassidy makes a very good point: why spy on those Americans that mean no harm to the United States? The N.S.A. can always go to court and obtain wiretaps or search warrants for those people who are under investigation. There are many resources the government can use to obtain

such information, yet they choose to have these surveillance programs on millions of innocent people.

Another reason why I think Edward Snowden is a hero is because, in my opinion, these surveillance programs are likely to be a violation of the Fourth Amendment, regarding the right to privacy. The government created these amendments and is not even following its own rules. These surveillance programs can gather much private information, such as passwords, phone records, even credit cards. It is certainly not fair to collect these types of information. What kind of privacy do we have if the government is constantly spying on everyone? "At a Senate hearing, Oregon Democrat Ron Wyden, one of the few legislators to sound any misgivings over the activities of the intelligence agencies, asked [James] Clapper, [Obama's director of National Intelligence], 'Does the N.S.A. collect any type of data at all on millions … of Americans?'" (Cassidy 2). Clapper replied "No" and "Not wittingly." The same with General Keith Alexander, the director of the N.S.A., in another hearing he was asked the same question. He denied that they had the capability to collect such information (2). So, why would they deny these programs if it is the right thing to do? Just like John Cassidy states in his article, "Thanks to Snowden, and what he told the *Guardian* and the Washington *Post*, we now have cause to doubt the truth of this testimony"(2). The Fourth Amendment is important to everyone in the country because it's a constitutional right to feel safe and secure in our homes. If the police wish to search a home or other place for evidence of a crime, they must first convince a judge. They must show enough evidence to the judicial branch in order to obtain the warrant. So, if the government is violating the Fourth Amendment, how are we supposed to feel secure



from those who have more power than us? It is certainly not fair that they have the right to do such violation and get away with it.

I also think that Edward Snowden did no lasting harm to the national security of his country because no military operations were engaged. I mean, why call him a traitor if he did not expose any military plans or conversations? This is important because then he would have been putting our country at harm. He respected their privacy and our security. He also didn't reveal about the groups or individuals that the agency targets. Snowden's revelation was in general. Snowden did not reveal specific information so that he can be considered a traitor in the United States. In the article, by John Cassidy, it states, "'[Snowden] spent months meticulously studying every document,' Greenwald said. 'He didn't just upload them to the Internet'" (2). Even though his actions were not carefully taken (fleeing to Hong Kong), Snowden was very careful of what information he revealed to the public.

In my conclusion and many others, Edward Snowden is a whistle-blower, an American hero. He has brought to light important information that deserved to be in public because these surveillance programs are likely a violation of the Fourth Amendment. He did not engage any military operations. Therefore, in my eyes Snowden is not to be considered a traitor. His action might not have been the best one, but he was certainly right in revealing the N.S.A. surveillance programs. This issue has brought a lot of controversy in our country that might never come to an agreement, but as the years pass by we would get a better understanding of the issue and Snowden's actions. The future of this controversy is important to our society because the decision should be in our hands. To what extent are we going to allow the government to do as they please? This country is for the people. We should be allowed to carefully consider the future of these surveillance programs.

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Amy Gigliotti

Basic Writing

Portfolio Essay

December 8, 2013

Dramatic Change

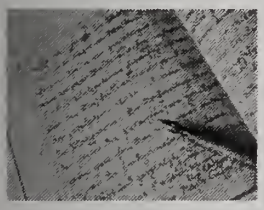
From the beginning, I honestly had no idea how I was going to manage this class. Personally, I always hated writing essays. In high school, I remember always getting my work done, but writing essays were always a challenge. I honestly dreaded this class in the beginning, but in the end, I ended up really enjoying it. Basic Writing has changed my writing dramatically. Throughout this class a lot has improved in my writing including my thesis statement, pre-writing, and adding detail.

First and foremost, my thesis statement has improved dramatically. Before this class I never knew how to write a good thesis statement. I forgot how much a thesis statement means to your essay. Once you have your thesis statement, you're good to go for the rest of your essay. For instance, in my media essay my thesis statement was, "Instagram is a source of inspiration, entertainment and bonding." By writing those three key words, I was able to write the body of my essay very easily. My three body paragraphs were explaining those three keys words: inspiration, entertainment, and bonding. My thesis statements have allowed my writing to improve dramatically and have also allowed writing to become easier for me.

Secondly, pre-writing has also allowed my writing to improve. Before this class, I never did pre-writing for any of my essays. I would just start writing with no plan or direction in which I wanted my essay to go. In my pre-writing, I would first establish my thesis statement. I would try to first establish three key words that would allow me to write my body paragraphs. Once I

had my three key words, I was able to put my thesis statement together. Once I had my thesis statement, I then would write down any quotes that I wanted to use in my essay. For the essays that needed quotes, I would try to have a quote for each key word in my thesis statement.

Journaling was another way I approached my pre-writing. For instance, before I wrote



my narrative essay, I wrote nonstop for ten minutes, writing down any thoughts that came to mind. I started my journal by saying, "I remember the day exactly, it was a rainy, dark, fall evening." From there, I proceeded to write about my car accident that happened to me within a 24-hour time span. Writing that journal allowed me to write my essay a lot more smoothly. Basically, in my pre-writing I would write down anything that came to mind that would allow me to write a better essay.

Lastly, adding more detail has allowed my writing to improve. Basic Writing has really allowed me to think deeper into all of my essays. I was really able to get into all of my essays because of how much I really had to think about the details and dialogue. Adding dialogue was a challenge for me. It is hard for me to remember exact things people have said in my past. For instance, in my narrative essay I wrote about my car accident that happened about four years ago. It was a really big challenge for me to remember exact details and dialogue because I honestly don't remember much after my accident. I was in complete shock after my accident, which has left me to not remember a lot of details. Writing my narrative essay was definitely a challenge, but in the end I really enjoyed writing it. I wrote, "After everything had happened and I was stopped in the breakdown lane, I remember looking back out on the highway and seeing how busy the highway was. I didn't know what to do, I was completely speechless and in shock." I remember that part exactly as if it was just yesterday. Adding more detail allowed me to relive

parts of my life that I had forgotten about and also allowed me to really appreciate my writing more.

Overall, Basic Writing has changed my writing dramatically. A lot has improved in my writing, including my thesis statement, pre-writing, and adding details. After taking this class, I can now appreciate my writing more. Writing allows me to write down all my thoughts and feelings that I typically wouldn't say out loud. My journey of college has just begun and Basic Writing was a great way for me to start it off.

Samantha Dacey

Basic Writing

Portfolio Essay

April 24, 2014

Writing Has Helped Me Grow

Writing was always a difficult task for me in high school. I struggled with it a lot, to the point I did not participate in English class. I had a problem organizing my thoughts. I did well on the essay part of my G.E.D. test. So when I took my assessment test at NECC, I figured I would do fine. I was so discouraged to find out that I had to take a basic writing course. My brother, who attends NECC now, made fun of me. I was even more discouraged. I figured a basic writing course would do me no good, because I did not believe that I needed it. Since then I feel that I have had a successful semester in Basic Writing; I can move on to English Comp I with confidence. The things that have helped me the most in writing are adding details, prewriting, and going to the writing center.

The first most important thing that has helped me in writing is adding details to my writing. Adding details, especially to an essay, opens up so much more depth to the paper. It draws readers in and keeps them interested. I had to add more detail in both my object essay and person essay. I wrote my person essay about my great-grandmother. I added descriptive detail to describe what she looked like. In my essay I wrote "She had crystal blue eyes, as blue as the ocean." I think that was a good way of describing how blue her eyes were. It also let readers know how they looked. Adding detail to an essay can make a simple essay way more interesting. That is why adding detail was a big thing I learnt how to do in writing.

Second, prewriting has helped me in a huge way in my writing. Prewriting is a great way to organize your thoughts before actually writing a formal essay. It gives you a chance to be messy and to jot everything thing down, without worrying about form or punctuation. There are several different types of prewriting. There are journals, story boards, and questions. For example, in my narrative essay, I used a story board to explain a life-changing event in my life. What I did was draw little pictures that led up to the event. For my narrative essay I also wrote a journal. These two things helped me to organize my thoughts in a not so structured way. In return, it was really easy to write my essay. Prewriting is so important in writing; it helped me a great deal.

Lastly, the Writing Center has helped me a great deal in my writing. The Writing Center is a great place you can go, and someone will review your work and give their opinion on certain things about the essay. They will also help you if things are in the wrong format, if you have run on sentences, or if you need to add more detail. I went to the Writing Center for all of my essays. Most importantly, they helped me a lot on my object essay. The object essay was tough for me, because I felt like how much more could I write about the object? The Writing Center gave me good ideas for adding more detail to the description and why the object is important to me. The Writing Center was very important on my journey to becoming a better writer.

In conclusion, writing is not so tough for me anymore. I can organize what is on my mind now. All the things I have learnt in Basic Writing have taught me how to write about me, or someone I know, or something that has happened to me, or an opinion. It has taught me how to describe things clearly and state the facts clearly. I doubted myself in the beginning; I felt discouraged. I feel so much more confident now going into English Comp I. I am so glad I had the opportunity to do this writing course; I will be a better writer now because of it.

Cody Merrill

Basic Writing

Portfolio Essay

Dec. 9, 2013

Time Flies

This year has gone by incredibly fast, and I have learned and changed completely as a writer. The first day of college made me pretty nervous. Not only would I not know anybody, but I had no idea of what to expect from my classes. Basic Writing was my first college class ever, and on the first day I began to regret having to take it. As the teacher explained about the course, he told all of us that there was going to be a lot of writing including essays, journals, and other writing assignments. My first thought was *Oh great, here we go again*, but as it turned out I actually began to enjoy it. I began to develop as a writer and as the semester went on, things began to get easier and easier. I would have to say that the things that helped me the most as a writer in this class were the prewriting, the journal entries, and the more intricate revision processes we learned.

One thing that really helped me develop as a writer was the prewriting process. In previous English and literature classes that I took in high school and middle school, I would just begin writing an essay without preparation and make changes during the writing process. Most of my content before would just come to me while I was writing the paper without much organization. But the prewriting process really helped me develop better organization skills and caused my essays to get better as a whole. For example, in the process of writing the person essay, the drawing of the stick figure and labeling the characteristics of my mother really helped me to decide what I wanted to do with the essay. By answering questions, organizing thoughts,

and looking at stories in a different way, I was able to develop a different means of writing that was far superior to my previous style of writing. I could not only organize my thoughts better, but come up with new ideas and better processes of writing that caused my papers to grow better and better.

Another method that I learned that helped me exponentially was the task of writing journals. Writing journals was a little odd to me, because I have never been good at putting my

thoughts down on paper. Although it took me a while to warm up to the concept of other people "reading my thoughts," after a couple of entries I was able to get the hang of it, and they started to flow out of my mind and onto the paper in no time. This really helped me grow as a writer because I was able to broaden my horizons and could use the words from my journals in my essays to help prove my point. One such example of when it helped me was in my opinion essay, where my journal entries really helped me express my feelings on certain matters. All in all, I believe that writing the journals may seem trivial in the beginning, but in the end it really helped me develop as a writer and be able to express views that I have never been able to explain before.

The third and final method that I believe really helped me become a better writer was the revision process we learned all about. In high school, writing became more serious than in previous years. The revision process that we were taught was far less detailed, and it took its toll on my papers. The process that I learned here was far more superior and far more successful. One such revision strategy was reading the paper aloud. I never thought that something as simple as reading a paper aloud would make such a difference. I soon found that even after I read the paper over multiple times in my head, I would find multiple places where I could make the paper more organized and find better ways to word things that would better help me prove my point.

My object essay was giving me trouble on how to fit all of the descriptive terms together without conflict. Reading the essay aloud multiple times allowed me to adjust the flow of the paper until everything was in unison. This is only one tip that I received in this class that helped me advance down the path of writing.

I was a decent writer in high school, but I had a lot of room for improvement as I soon learned in this class. There are countless things that I learned in this class that boosted my level of writing to a place far beyond what I thought was possible. Prewriting, journaling, and the revision process all played an instrumental part in my advancement of knowledge and writing style. However, I learned a lot more than just how to become a better writer; I learned that writing is much more than it was a process of digging deep into my mind and bringing forth the contents and bequeathing it to my peers.

Jackie Blanchette

English Composition 1

Research Paper

December 2013

ELL in America

How would you feel sitting in a classroom not being able to understand what your teacher or classmates are saying? Or not being able to read the words on the page or on the board? Well this is a reality for 10% of students in public schools throughout the US. Students who are not fluent in English are English language learners (Payán and Nettles). Although we have seen this issue continue to expand in the past years, we have not seen a lot of interest put into trying to make it easier for ELL students to learn English. With the expected number of ELL students to grow rapidly to one out of every four students, we need to take a good look at how we are dealing with the education of ELLs now, what is working, and what needs to be addressed and changed *(English Language Learners* 1).

There are many perceptions of ELL students, and although they don't seem like a big deal they are affecting the lives of the students who are learning English. The first thing is that many people think that ELL students are only the students who do not know English. That is not true. Fluency in language encompasses all the aspects of speech and literacy such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Menken and Kleyn). Without all these components a student will not be successful in their education. Also, it is believed that ELL students have come to the US after their education has already begun, but in reality 75% of ELL students are citizens and were born in America (Payán and Nettles). This means that the child grew up in a family that doesn't speak English and therefore was never exposed to it until they got to school. Perceptions

cloud the truth about students learning English, making it hard for experts and educators to change the path for the ELL students and make it easier for them to learn a new language and get a good education.

Dropouts among ELL students are very common because they do not get the education they need to feel successful in school. Though they may be in a classroom with other children, all learning the same material, they are not learning or interpreting the same way because of the language barrier they have. In the article *English Language Learners Face Unique Challenges*, it says, "But what is most significant—and troubling—is that these students' academic performance is well below that of their peers and that ELLs have excessively high dropout rates" (1). When a student drops out of high school that decreases the likelihood of that student getting a job. This can explain why two-thirds of the ELL population is living under the poverty level *(English Language Learners* 1). All of this causes a vicious cycle for families/parents who do not know English and cannot teach their children it. Many children who grew up speaking a different language other than English are not exposed to English until they reach kindergarten and then they are very far behind, and it becomes extremely hard to catch up. These children do not receive the education they need to learn English, so when they have children they are not able to teach their child English, until eventually the second or third generation here in America has finally become fluent in English *(English Language Learners* 1). Families who are not properly taught English account for most of the ELL population in America. The best solution to this problem is to find a way to teach the first generation English so they can pass it down, but as we can see, it has not been this easy.

Figure 1: Achievement Gap in Massachusetts

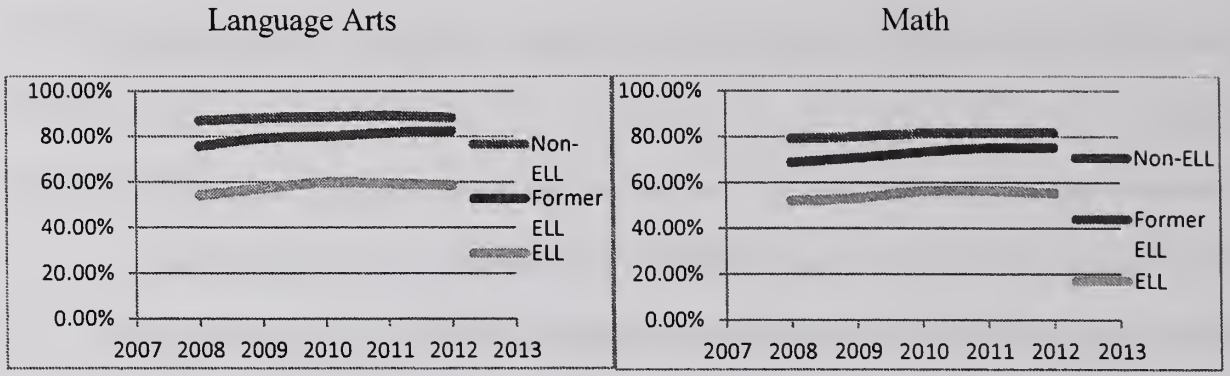


Fig. 1. "District Analysis, Review, & Assistance Tools." *Overview*. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 31 Oct. 2013. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.

The term "achievement gap" refers to the differences in test scores between a majority group such as non-ELL students and a minority group such as ELL students. In these scores shown by Figure 1 between students in Massachusetts, we see almost a 20% difference in scores between students that are fluent in English and students who are not. But what is most startling is that even students who are former English language learners are still not at the same level. This shows how much education students have lost by not knowing English. Though they have learned English, former ELL students still have that frustration of not knowing the material because they have missed out on so much. This can cause low test scores and high school dropouts in ELL students, which is a big problem in American students.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) was put in place in 2001 to ensure that every child in America receives the same quality education. The NCLBA regulates every aspect of education, including the education of ELL students. Although this law was made to improve the quality of education children receive, there are some flaws in the system. This mandate requires every state to come up with standards for assessment and programs for the ELL students in the state's schools *(English Language Learners* 2). Because each state comes up with its own

system, it becomes very hard to compare data and programs. The assessment and proficiency standards for ELLs in Massachusetts are under WIDA, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment. The WIDA Access test assesses the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of the students. They are then put on an ELL plan and determined what level they are in (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Although other states use WIDA, many do not and it makes it difficult to compare data and programs for ELL students.

ELL programs across the country change from state to state, which makes it hard to educate a student when they are frequently moving. It is very common that ELL students move across states and sometimes even move in and out of the country. The journal article "The Difficult Road for Long-Term English Learners" by Kate Menken and Tatyana Kleyn shows us how a student, Jose Miguel, has been affected by having different ELL programs in two states as well as moving in and out of America. Jose started his schooling in New York, where he was placed in a bilingual program. During his second grade year he went to live in Mexico for two years and didn't attend school. When he came back to America, he lived in Virginia and was placed in a fourth grade classroom and did not have any specific English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. After missing years of education, he was not placed in any special program or class to help him regain the information he lost when he was in Mexico. Nor did he have any instruction to help him learn English (Menken and Kleyn). This happens so often in our public schools and our students suffer greatly for the inadequate education.

The education the ELL students are receiving is incredibly underfunded and lacks the knowledge we need to make the difference for these kids. "Many states simply did not have the expertise, time, or resources to develop valid and reliable assessments that meet the needs for accuracy and fairness" *(English Language Learners* 2). If the federal government came up with

rules and standards to regulate what the states were doing, it would be very beneficial in the education of ELLs. Not only will it help keep track of the records of ELL students throughout the states, it will help experts be able to study the methods and assessments that will best help these students and come up with better programs so we can have the best quality education we can find for the ELL students. By doing this we can begin to change the education for ELL students.

Teachers play a huge role in a child's education. The problem is many teachers do not know how to teach ELL children. Teachers are not taught how to educate ELLs when they are studying to become teachers. Many schools are doing very little to ensure that their teachers are prepared to teach these students. In table 1 from "A Qualitative Inquiry into the Experiences of High-Potential Hispanic English Language Learners in Midwestern Schools" by Nielsen Pereira and Marcia Gentry, it shows that many of the teachers in our schools have had no more training than just workshops or none at all. Even a teacher that is specifically there to help the ELL students does not have any training to teach the ELL students. How are the students learning English supposed to learn when their teachers do not know how to help them?

Table 1

Teacher Qualifications

Table 3. Demographic Information of the Teacher Interviewees.

Teacher code	Grade	Gender	Years experience	ESL training	G/T training
1A	1	F	31	None	None
2A	2	F	4	Workshops	None
2B	2	F	15	Workshops	Coursework/workshops
4D	2	F	10	Workshops	None
3A	2	F	18	Workshops	Coursework/workshops
3B	3	F	27	Workshops	Coursework
3C	3	F	40	Workshops	None
3D	3	F	29	Workshops	Workshops
4A	3	F	29	Workshops	Workshops
4B	4	F	3	Coursework	Workshops
4C	4	F	13	Workshops	License
4D	4	F	8	None	Master's
4E	4	M	6	Workshops	None
5A	4	F	8	Workshops	Coursework
5B	5	F	19	None	Coursework
5C	5	F	25	Workshops	Not sure
5D	5	M	6	Workshops	Coursework
5E	5	F	12	None	Workshops
ELA	ESL	F	<1	None	None
ELB	ESL	F	6	Workshops	None
ELC	ESL	F	13	License	Coursework
ELD	ESL	F	3	License	None
ELE	ESL	F	35	Workshops	None

Note. Participants ELA through ELE were ESL teachers and/or aides. Workshops included inservice professional development and conferences. ESL = English as a second language. G/T = gifted and talented.

Source: Nielsen Pereira and Marcia Gentry. "A Qualitative Inquiry into the Experiences of High-Potential Hispanic English Language Learners in Midwestern Schools." *Journal Of Advanced Academics* 24.3 (2013): 164-194. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 3 Nov. 2013.

The best way to help students is to make sure that all teachers are educated in how to teach students who are not fluent in English. Many teachers don't feel comfortable teaching ELL students because they don't have the resources to do so. In the article *English Language Learners Face Unique Challenges*, it says says, "Teachers also expressed frustration over the wide range of English language and academic levels and the fact that they received little professional development or in-service training" (2). A way that we can make sure all students are receiving a quality education is by having trained qualified teachers. Massachusetts is now requiring all public school teachers who have an ELL student in their class to take a course

called the Massachusetts Sheltered English Instruction. This course is to train teachers to use the best way to educate their ELL students by teaching them what strategies will work and what resources they can use. This could be a good strategy the country could use to give the ELL students what they need to become successful in their education. It is too early to tell if this new mandate in Massachusetts has positively affected ELL education. If, in the end, the improvement in ELLs is good, then it could change the way they learn and what type of education they receive.

While all aspects of education have been an issue in the past years, we see the need there is to take into consideration how the ELL programs are run throughout the country. ELLs have very different needs than the other students, and we need to understand that when we educate them. If we change the qualifications for teachers and have mandated laws that are country-wide, we can make a difference in the lives of English language learners.

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